

NEWS RELEASE  
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## **ISTOOK TESTIFIES ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

Washington, D.C. - Oklahoma Congressman Ernest J. Istook, Jr., (R-05), today gave testimony to the House Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution concerning religious expression and freedoms.

Istook is the lead member of Congress on the issue of protection for voluntary school prayer and other forms of religious expression.

"Religious freedom was a vital motive which prompted many people to come across the oceans to this country," Istook said at the hearing. "Our Founding Fathers...enshrined within the Declaration of Independence the words that all men are created equal, and that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights."

"In Philadelphia, on Constitution Hall itself, is permanently written, 'Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair. The event is in the hands of God.' The words were spoken by George Washington."

"Unfortunately, despite the freedoms enshrined in our Constitution, millions of Americans today believe their freedom of religion, and of religious expression, is endangered. The most-frequently publicized comments mention prayer in public schools, or at graduations. But although this concern began in the 1960's, with court decisions outlawing vocal prayer at school by groups of students, it has not ended there."

"From classroom prayer, the court restrictions on religious expression have expanded. In a case involving a Jewish rabbi, it was determined to restrict graduation prayers as well. Now our courts are clogged with students begging to offer their own prayers at graduation."

"The Ten Commandments, the source of so many of our own laws, was banned not only from the schoolhouse, but also from the courthouse. And at holiday times, nativity scenes were kicked off of public property, unless their dangerous influence was diminished by including enough plastic reindeer, or maybe Frosty the Snowman, to counter-balance them."

"Even a state law to permit a moment of silence law was struck down by the Supreme Court in 1985, because it could be used for silent prayer."

"A year and a half ago, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission proposed new regulations, to have the federal government control and restrict what people in the workplace could or could not say about their religion and their beliefs."

"Although Congressional outcries killed that plan, some federal efforts continue. For example, trainers for AIDS awareness seminars, mandatory for federal workers, were taught that they might need to break down the religious beliefs of training participants. And now there is a memo from the IRS--the Internal Revenue Service, telling federal workers that on their own desks they cannot keep any type of religious symbol."

"We hear 'diversity', 'tolerance' and 'inclusion' used as buzzwords. Then we're told not to tolerate somebody else's prayer, that somehow it is a danger to us. This is a topsy-turvy philosophy. The vast majority of Americans reject it. We need to see clearly, and recognize that the problem stems from the intolerance towards people of faith."

Rep. Istook plans to introduce a proposed Constitutional amendment sometime this year, aimed at reinforcing Americans' rights to religious expression.

The Constitution Subcommittee plans to hold several hearings around the country, including one in Oklahoma City in July.